

Sonnets

Fourteen Lines

What Is a Sonnet?

A sonnet is a fourteen-line lyric poem, usually written in iambic pentameter, that has one of several rhyme schemes.

- The two most common types of sonnets are
 - Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnets
 - Shakespearean, or English, sonnets
- A less common type of sonnet is the Spenserian sonnet.

Petrarchan Sonnets

The Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnet is named after the fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarca (known as Petrarch in English). Petrarch

- popularized and perfected the form
- wrote more than three hundred sonnets addressed to a woman identified only as Laura
- used **Petrarchan conceits**—ingenious and fanciful comparisons of two apparently very different things
 - Example: Love is a baited hook.

Petrarchan Sonnets: Form

- Two parts
 - an eight-line section, called the octave
 - a six-line section, called the sestet
- Rhyme scheme
 - *abbaabba* for the octave
 - *cdecde*, *cdcdcd*, or *cdedce* for the sestet

Petrarchan Sonnets: Form

- Organization
 - The octave presents a problem, question, or idea.
 - The sestet resolves the problem, answers the question, or emphasizes the idea.
 - The turn—a shift in focus or thought—usually occurs between the octave and sestet (often in line 9) and acts as the transition between the two sections.

“Composed upon Westminster Bridge” by William Wordsworth

	Earth has not anything to show more fair:	<i>a</i>
	Dull would he be of soul who could pass by	<i>b</i>
	A sight so touching in its majesty:	<i>b</i>
	This City now doth, like a garment, wear	<i>a</i>
5	The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,	<i>a</i>
	Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie	<i>b</i>
	Open unto the fields, and to the sky;	<i>b</i>
	All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.	<i>a</i>
	Never did sun more beautifully steep	<i>c</i>
10	In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill;	<i>d</i>
	Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!	<i>c</i>
	The river glideth at his own sweet will:	<i>d</i>
	Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;	<i>c</i>
	And all that mighty heart is lying still!	<i>d</i>

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The octave
states an idea.

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The sestet
emphasizes
the idea.

Shakespearean Sonnets

The Shakespearean, or English, sonnet is named after William Shakespeare.

- Shakespeare wrote more than one hundred fifty sonnets.
 - All of his sonnets have a male speaker.
 - Many deal with the subject of love.

Shakespearean Sonnets: Form

- Four parts
 - three 4-line stanzas, called quatrains
 - one 2-line section, called a couplet
- Rhyme scheme
 - *abab* for the first quatrain
 - *cdcd* for the second quatrain
 - *efef* for the third quatrain
 - *gg* for the couplet

Shakespearean Sonnets: Form

- Organization
 - The three quatrains express related ideas and examples or present a question and tentative answers.
 - The couplet sums up the speaker's conclusion or message.
 - The turn—a shift in focus or thought—usually occurs in the third quatrain. A second turn often occurs in the couplet.

Sonnet 130

by William Shakespeare

	My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,	<i>a</i>
	Coral is far more red than her lips' red.	<i>b</i>
	If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,	<i>a</i>
	If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.	<i>b</i>
5	I have seen roses damasked, red and white,	<i>c</i>
	But no such roses see I in her cheeks.	<i>d</i>
	And in some perfumes is there more delight	<i>c</i>
	Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks,	<i>d</i>
	I love to hear her speak, yet well I know	<i>e</i>
10	That music hath a far more pleasing sound.	<i>f</i>
	I grant I never saw a goddess go,	<i>e</i>
	My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.	<i>f</i>
	And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare	<i>g</i>
	As any she belied with false compare.	<i>g</i>

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The three
quatrains
express related
ideas.

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The couplet
comments on
the situation.

Spenserian Sonnets

The Spenserian sonnet is named after the Renaissance poet Edmund Spenser.

- Spenser's *Amoretti* is a sequence of eighty-nine sonnets, which record a man's two-year courtship of a woman named Elizabeth.
- Spenser kept the division and organization of the standard Shakespearean, or English, sonnet but varied the rhyme scheme.
 - *abab* for the first quatrain
 - *cdcd* for the third quatrain
 - *bcbc* for the second quatrain
 - *ee* for the couplet

Sonnet 75

by Edmund Spenser

	One day I wrote her name upon the strand,	<i>a</i>
	But came the waves and washèd it away;	<i>b</i>
	Again I wrote it with a second hand,	<i>a</i>
	But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.	<i>b</i>
5	“Vain man,” said she, “that doest in vain assay, A mortal thing so to immortalize, For I myself shall like to this decay, And eke my name be wipèd out likewise.”	<i>b</i> <i>c</i> <i>b</i> <i>c</i>
10	“Not so,” quod I, “let baser things devise To die in dust, but you shall live by fame: My verse your virtues rare shall eternize, And in the heavens write your glorious name. Where whenas death shall all the world subdue, Our love shall live, and later life renew.”	<i>c</i> <i>d</i> <i>c</i> <i>d</i> <i>e</i> <i>e</i>

What Have You Learned?

1. A sonnet has _____ lines.
a. twelve b. thirteen **c. fourteen**
2. _____ sonnets are also known as Italian sonnets.
a. Spenserian **b. Petrarchan** c. Shakespearean
3. Sonnets are written in iambic _____.
a. pentameter b. hexameter c. trimeter
4. A Petrarchan conceit is a comparison of two like items.
a. true **b. false**

The End